

# The UFO watchers

by Des Wilson

Reports of sightings of unidentified flying objects have been increasing over recent years and a number of organizations all over the world have been formed to collate and investigate them. The author has talked to some of the British personalities involved in "ufology".

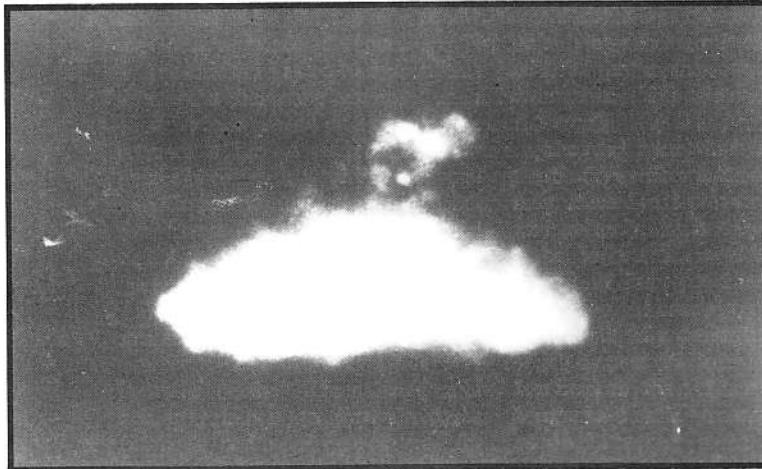
Photographs by Chris Barker.

This has been a good year for flying saucers. The film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* has packed cinemas. The House of Lords held the first parliamentary debate on the subject. Last month there was an international conference in London. This month sees the start of a study course on unidentified flying objects (UFOs) sponsored by an academic institute in London, Morley College. And a well known whisky firm has offered a prize of £1 million "for a device which can be proved to have been activated to arrive on earth from beyond our solar system. Such a device must be either: a craft capable of interstellar travel which has transported extra-terrestrial beings to earth; or an unmanned reconnaissance vehicle; or a missile; or an artefact."

That there have been no entries for the competition is surprising, for there has been no shortage of "sightings"; indeed the journal of Bufora (the British UFO Research Association) reports many. For instance, there was the case of security manager Paul Brown and his step-brother, David Barrowcliffe, who, according to the Bufora journal, were driving down the M3 motorway near Walton-on-Thames last December when they noticed an object in the sky. It was disc-shaped, with four red lights surrounding it. "Something dull silver like a ball then dropped from the object, floated across the motorway and landed in a field on the other side. The UFO was now in level flight about 200 feet up and Paul drove on to the hard shoulder, switching off the ignition to listen: the sound the object was making was similar to that of an electric train boosting its motor. It eventually went off at a speed building up to an estimated 200 mph staying in line with the motorway."

According to Bufora, UFOs come in all shapes and sizes: discus-shaped, saucer-shaped, cigar-shaped, triangular, spherical, hemispherical; in the day-time silver, white or grey, and in darkness usually red, orange, yellow, green or blue. At a distance they are usually said to be silent; at close quarters they have been described as making a humming sound.

As the tremendous success of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* demonstrated, few subjects so fascinate people as the possibility of landings from outer space. While researching this article I discovered that a surprisingly high number of friends and acquaintances believe in the possibility of life in outer space. Most take the view once expressed in *The Illustrated London*



Ralph Ditter, a barber in the United States, claims to have taken the photograph of an unidentified flying object, top, at his home in Ohio in November, 1967; the brightly lit object, above, was photographed from Concorde in June, 1973, over Central Africa by scientists observing an eclipse of the sun.

News by Patrick Moore: "We must remember that the sun is only one of 100,000 million suns in our galaxy, and there are thousands of millions of other galaxies. It seems illogical to assume that our own insignificant sun is unique in being attended by a peopled planet."

Some people, however, believe more than others. Approaching them is difficult for two reasons. First, most are terrified of being assumed to be crazy, or of being made fun of. "Are you taking this seriously, or are you taking

the mickey?" asked the president of Contact International, Ruth Rees, when I telephoned. The second problem is that there is considerable rivalry, mutual suspicion and even ridicule between different organizations and individuals. No one actually told me that anyone else was off-beam, but hesitations when names were mentioned and subtle little hints left little doubt what, for instance, some members of Bufora felt about some members of Contact, and vice-versa.

The vast majority of those concerned with UFOs in Britain are members of one or other or both of these organizations. The one uncontroversial personality, the "elder statesman" of the British flying saucer movement, is a 68-year-old peer, the Earl of Clancarty, founder of Contact, and a vice-president of Bufora.

Lord Clancarty was born Brinsley Le Poer Trench. He started to keep a scrap book about reports of flying saucers after the last war, and in the mid 50s he and nine others put together £100 to form an organization called Flying Saucer Service Limited and to publish a magazine called *Flying Saucer Review*. That magazine is now approaching its 25th year. He became editor in 1959. In 1960 he published a book called *The Sky People* and it was such a success that he launched himself on a career as the author of such titles as *Men Among Mankind*, *Operation Earth* and *The Flying Saucer Story*. In 1967 he founded Contact International to link up those people concerned with flying saucers all over the world. He inherited his title from his brother in 1976 and shortly afterwards tabled a question in the Lords on UFOs. In January of this year he succeeded in having a debate on the subject.

He told their Lordships how the term "flying saucers" came about: "On June 24, 1947, an American called Kenneth Arnold, piloting his own plane somewhere in the Cascade Mountains in the state of Washington, spotted nine gleaming objects, crescent shaped, flying in a zig-zag fashion between his plane and the mountains. He managed to calculate their speed because he was able to get a fix between two mountain peaks. It appeared that the objects were travelling at some 1,400 miles per hour. Some time after landing Arnold described the motion of the flying objects as being like saucers skimming over water. Next day the Press headlined them as 'flying saucers.' After detailing various sightings Lord Clancarty called on the government "to inform our people of what they know about UFOs. The UFOs have been coming in increasing numbers for 30 years since the war, and it is time our people were told the truth. We have not been invaded from outer space. Most incidents have not been hostile. Indeed it is the earthlings who have fired on them ... It is on record that both sighting and landing reports are increasing all the time. Just suppose the Ufonauts decided to make mass landings tomorrow in this country—there



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could well be panic here because our people have not been prepared."

No fewer than 14 peers took part in the debate. One of Lord Clancarty's supporters was the Earl of Kimberly, who offered to join him in setting up a parliamentary UFO group.

Lord Clancarty lives in Chelsea and works in a tiny study overlooking the surrounding rooftops. It is packed with magazines of flying saucer organizations all over the world, and there are pictures of flying saucers on the walls. I asked him if he had ever seen a flying saucer. "I don't know about a flying saucer, but I have seen a UFO. I was in the kitchen of my then home in South Kensington and was looking out of the window when I saw an object passing by in zig-zag fashion, more like a pin point coming head on, but moving from one direction to another. I actually climbed into the kitchen sink to pull the window down to see it better. It seemed to alter in its size and became more oval-shaped. It was definitely not a plane because of the way it was moving, and there was an eerie white light about it. I didn't report it because I didn't want anyone to think I was crazy."

He has been particularly impressed by two recent sightings, one by a considerable number of people in a town in Russia who saw a huge object above the town last year, and one by hun-

dreds of people who saw a "very large glowing object" over Teheran in Iran. I put it to Lord Clancarty that one of the most puzzling aspects of the phenomena is that there have been so many sightings and yet no craft has stayed for a sufficient time to be adequately filmed or recorded. He then explained his theory about UFOs. "It is my belief that UFOs do not contain beings that are foreign to us, but beings that put us here originally. If they had put human beings on this planet from another one they would obviously be interested in what was happening. I have never believed this Darwin nonsense. It is my theory that Neanderthal man was converted into the human Cro-Magnon man some 30,000 years ago. Their visits are to keep an eye on us. It is noticeable that there have been a lot more sightings in the past 30 years or so, and I believe it's because they are becoming worried about the way we are going. They know we've landed on the moon. They know that we are playing about in space. Perhaps they are getting ready to warn us of some pending catastrophe."

Whatever one may think about Lord Clancarty's theory, at least he is prepared to stand up and be counted. One of the discoveries I made about the UFO movement is that every UFO-follower has a different theory.

Some take the straightforward view that UFOs are observers from other planets. Others believe that they are sophisticated craft, as yet unpublicized, of one of the superpowers on this

planet. One of the more bizarre theories is that they are propelled by psychic phenomena or demons. The Reverend Eric Inglesby, of Fairford, Gloucestershire, who wrote a book *UFOs and the Christian*, believes they are psychical phenomena "engineered to destroy straightforward belief in Jesus Christ alone as the saviour of all".

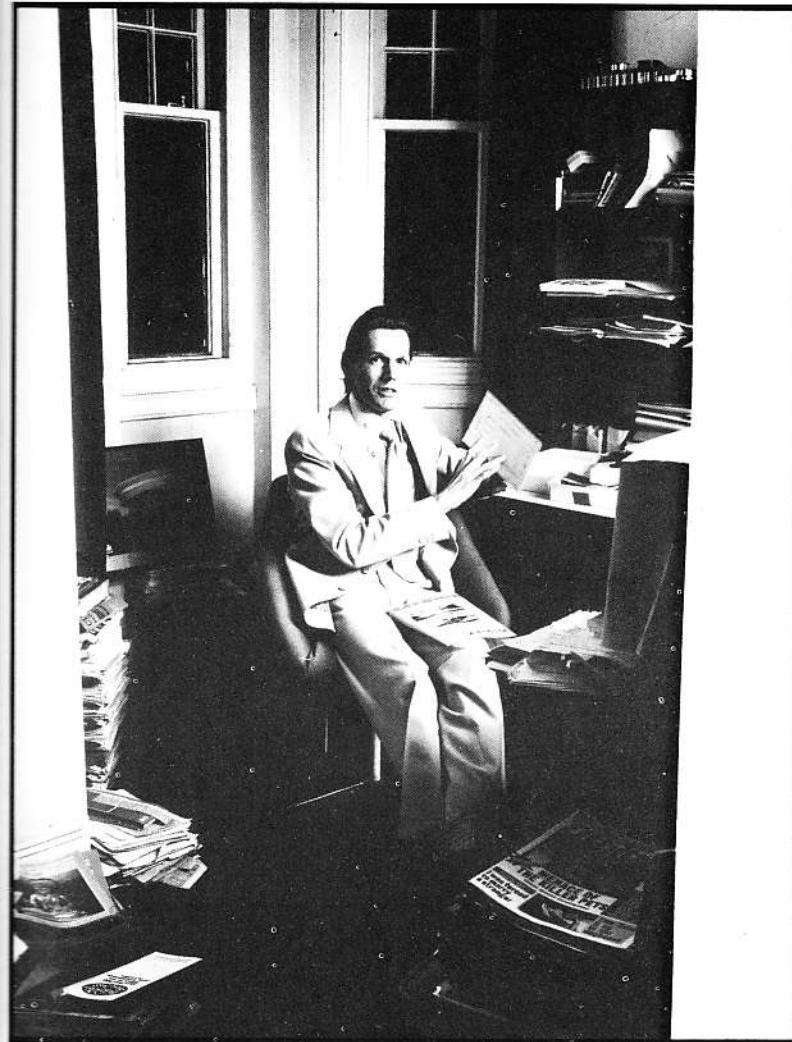
Ruth Rees, president of Contact International, is particularly dismissive of the psychic theory. Mrs Rees became interested in UFOs as a child when she was an amateur astronomer, and says that on a summer night in Cape Town she saw "two glowing things in the sky, standing perfectly still for five minutes. They were an orange-amber colour and there was no ordinary explanation. The next day I discovered that hundreds of people had reported them to the newspapers." She later lived in Spain and formed an organization of "ufologists" and organized a major conference there. She says she has no theory herself but "one little glimmer emerges. It appears to me that the incidence of sightings is growing to such an extent that sooner or later the whole mystery will be resolved."

Since Contact International was founded, it has developed organizations in 34 countries with approximately 11,000 individual members. A little of the unspoken rivalry between the two organizations is revealed when Mrs

Rees emphasizes that "while Bufora is the biggest in Britain, we are by far the biggest in the world!"

Bufora was created from a number of different groupings in 1964. It publishes a journal, holds monthly lectures (in the lecture theatre at Kensington Central Library on the first Saturday of the month) and conducts research into sightings in Britain. It claims to be "dedicated to the scientific investigation of UFO phenomena" and emphasizes the importance of objectivity. Its members vary from those who insist they have reached no conclusions about what UFOs really are, to those who, if not convinced, at least think there is a fair chance (even want to believe) that they are from another planet.

These contrasting attitudes can be found between the chairman of Bufora, 39-year-old Civil Servant Lionel Beer, and the editor of the Bufora journal, 52-year-old former Water Board official Norman Oliver. Beer is extremely cautious and most anxious to avoid being written off as "a nut". He says, "I'm not in the believing business—I'm interested in the scientific study of unexplained phenomena, and whatever you think the phenomena may be you cannot deny that they exist. Too many people have seen them. As far as I'm concerned serious-minded people in the UFO business are involved in a quest for an explanation." Beer has been involved in what he calls



Lionel Beer, above, is the chairman of Bufora (British UFO Research Association); Norman Oliver, above right, is the editor of the Bufora journal.

"the UFO business" for 20 years but has never seen a UFO himself. He believes that if we were to get a freedom of information act in Britain, so that Members of Parliament and journalists could get access to material currently restricted under the Official Secrets Act, we would discover a lot of information on UFOs within the Ministry of Defence.

Norman Oliver, on the other hand, admits, "I would like to think that they are extra-terrestrial craft" but, despite having seen two UFOs himself, he still has not made up his mind after over 20 years of active involvement. Oliver has spent a lot of time "scouting out areas where reports come in". He has also studied reports of many more sightings. Those that have impressed him most because of the authority of the witnesses are one in New Guinea in 1957, where no fewer than 37 people saw a "craft with beings"; one in 1965 when Chilean, Argentinian and British occupants of three Antarctic bases were all reported to have seen UFOs; and one near Brazil in 1957, where the crew of a ship were reported to have seen a Saturn-shaped metallic object perform a figure of eight.

In addition to the two national organizations there are a variety of local organizations, and these are now starting to be co-ordinated. Jenny Randles, a 27-year-old freelance writer, is the co-ordinator of the Northern

UFO Network which brings together the activities of 18 out of Britain's 40 or more local groups. The biggest is in Leicester, with a membership of 150, but the Manchester one admits only people with a proven "track record" in the UFO business, some 15 in all. The network organizes conferences, publishes a monthly newsletter and maintains a house in Nottingham where it compiles data on sightings. It has over 1,500 cases on file there. Miss Randles says that a southern network is likely to be formed soon.

Miss Randles is also a dominant personality in the recently formed UFO Investigators' Network, linked with the magazine *Flying Saucer Review*. This only admits experts—"individuals who can prove they have the capability thoroughly to investigate a report, or a proven track record in ufology". It aims for high quality detailed reports on major cases and has only 48 members, who comprise most of the best-known UFO activists in Britain. They investigate some 20 cases a year, producing reports at least 20 pages, and sometimes 100 pages, in length.

Miss Randles became involved with UFOs in 1967 and last month published a book *UFOs—a British viewpoint*. Her researches have led to considerable cynicism about the theory that UFOs are flying saucers, that is visiting space craft from other planets. She believes that there is no single ex-



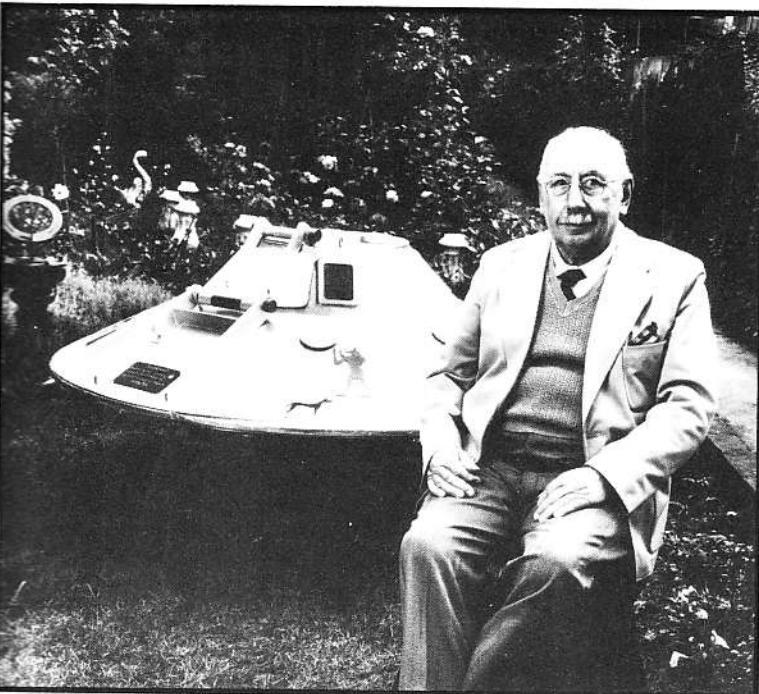
planation for UFOs, but three: "Undoubtedly if we are objective about reports of sightings we have to accept physical phenomena of some description, but there is no reason to assume they are propelled by beings from outer space. We are still not experts on our own environment and there is a real possibility that they are some novel physical phenomena from our own environment.

"Second, there is ample evidence of a strong psychological factor in what we call the close encounter cases, where people claim to have been confronted with craft and of beings from craft. I'm not saying they are entirely hallucinating, but that they may be susceptible to stimulus to hallucinate. What has happened to them is not real as it stands, but something could have happened and they could have been subjected to some psychological stimulus to comprehend it in the way they do.

"Third, there are the good quality, multiple-witness cases in which we have to look for a more practical explanation. These could be human-based phenomena externalizing their reality—in other words the phenomena tend to follow a human pattern and are interpreted as they are because of the desire of human beings for salvation from the stars."

To be fair to Miss Randles, she emphasized that it was almost impossible to explain these theories briefly, and indeed they form the substance of most of her book.

It has not been the purpose of this article to examine UFOs. That calls for a book. I have been concerned to discover the people in Britain who have devoted a considerable part of their lives to trying to find out more about the phenomena, of which there are thousands of reports. Their leading personalities are first to admit that they have within their number "a lunatic fringe", but many of them are intelligent people, who have no fixed theory but have devoted a lot of time and effort to trying to find some explanation. The researches by both Contact and Bufora and the other organizations are carried out with impressive thoroughness. Their right to some attention was articulated most impressively by Lord Davies of Leek in the debate in the House of Lords: "For a couple of generations now thousands of magazines have reported these sightings. We want to know whether these objects deserve real research in depth. Whether or not the reports are true, only our prejudices can decide, but it becomes more difficult to listen to such weird experiences from apparently honest, sane and unselfseeking men who place their findings before papers and governments. Are we right to call these men liars, hallucinators or sensationalists? If one human being out of the tens of thousands who allege to have seen these phenomena is telling the truth, then there is a dire need for us to look into the matter ... This is a serious debate. It deserves study and understanding."



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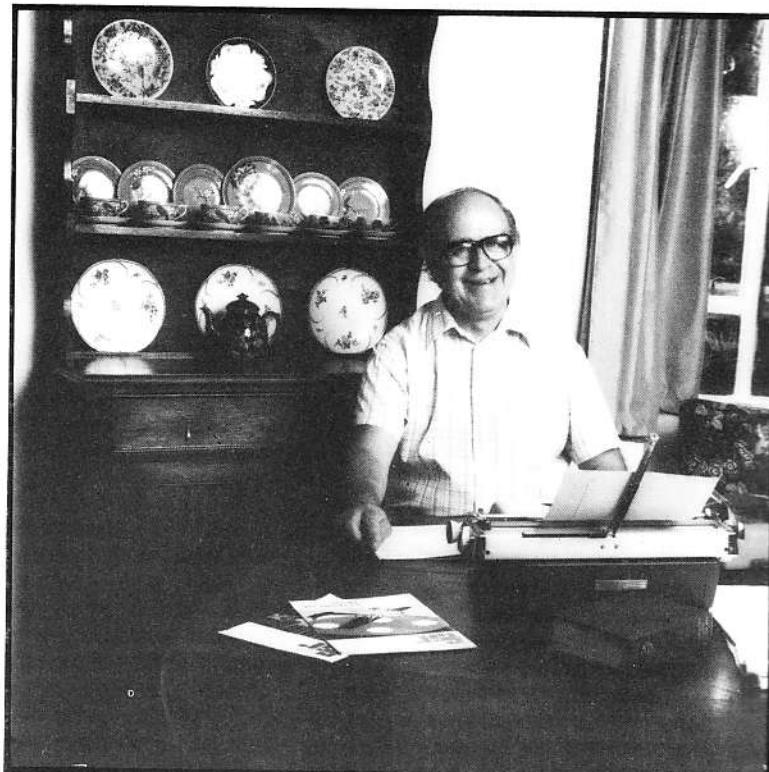
Graham Knewstub, who is now 70 years old, founded Britain's first UFO organization, the British Flying Saucer Bureau, based in Bristol. It has just celebrated its silver anniversary. Its local membership is now about 50 but it has a widely scattered associate membership. He says he has seen two UFOs. "The first was in 1960 in Avonmouth, one evening about 6 o'clock. The sky was clear and I saw a cigar-shaped craft drift slowly up and disappear into the cloud base. For a time it would be enveloped and then it would reappear. I don't know what it was, but it was a machine unlike any aircraft the

world had produced at that time, and I was in aircraft production so I should know. About the same time I was motoring on a wet night not far from Bristol when I saw lights, like fireflies in the sky. I switched off my lights and got out of the vehicle, and as they approached I saw that they were red, green and amber lights which seemed to be going on and off. As they got closer I realized they were not going on and off but rotating around the vehicle in the middle." Like most ufologists Mr Knewstub tries to keep an open mind about the explanation. He believes "there is a real probability they are of a technological nature, but I don't rule out a non-neutral influence on our minds—that their source may be in malignant spiritual intervention."

lecting data is to try and establish patterns. Another point is to build up a powerful case for the whole subject to get governmental aid for far more authoritative investigation."

Mr Delair emphasizes the danger of forming theories, but says: "No one can deny that we on Earth are using up our natural resources, and that some time we will have to find another solution. The creation of new homelands on other planets is one. Another is the creation of huge artificial worlds that can be launched into space. It may sound far-fetched, but who would have said 30 years back that man would have reached the moon? Now if UFOs are craft from outer space, they come from people far more technologically advanced than we are. Could not they have reached this point far before us, and have themselves created artificial worlds that are somewhere out there in space. If so, it's possible they've run into trouble and are surveying Earth to see whether we hold any answers. For instance, many of the landings take place near hospitals, sports stadiums and cemeteries. Could they be looking at the ill, the healthy and the dead to find out more about us physically, perhaps in the hope of inter-breeding?"

"I am concerned, because the UFOs are coming on their own terms—when and how they like. They don't wish to be answerable to us and don't stay to communicate. I think if we're being visited on someone else's terms, that's unsatisfactory. We must try to meet them on level terms. One point of col-



Charles Bowen, a retired Civil Servant, has been editor of one of the world's most respected magazines, *Flying Saucer Review*, for the past 15 years. It publishes about 4,000 copies bimonthly. He has never seen a UFO himself but says that the evidence of sightings by "honest, down-to-earth people, who report a thing that has puzzled or frightened them" is overwhelming. He says he fears that "there is something outside of our control that is attempting to control our minds". Whatever the explanation, he believes that the subject is crying out for international study on an official scale. The case that most impressed him was in France in 1965, when a lavender farmer was out in his fields at about 7 am. He heard a whistling noise and saw an object like a rugby football on

legs and a central pivot standing in the middle of one of his fields. "When he got close he saw two small creatures, 3 feet or 4 feet high, with large pumpkin-shaped heads, large almond-shaped eyes running round the side, no hair, a slit for a mouth, no nose, pointed chins and high, puffing cheeks. When he moved closer, one of them pulled out a small stick and pointed it at him and he was temporarily paralysed. The creatures were then taken up into the craft on what appeared to be a beam of light. He stood immobile for a while and the machine then took off. To this day that piece of ground has refused to grow any plant life." Mr Bowen admits that ufologists have to live with a credibility gap, but says that we must ask ourselves whether "the sheer weight of evidence" can be dismissed.

